



California Environmental Protection Agency

Department of Pesticide Regulation

How to Read a Pesticide Label... and Why

Every pesticide product you buy comes complete with detailed instructions--right on the label. The label is your main source of information on how to use the product correctly, safely, and legally. If there is an accident or illness, the label identifies the pesticide active ingredient so medical personnel can provide proper treatment. It is where you find out about special safety measures needed to protect yourself, those around you, and the environment. ***Read the label.***

The label helps you get maximum benefits at minimum risk. Read it before ***buying*** the pesticide. Read the label again, before ***using*** the pesticide, ***every time*** you use it. Do not trust your memory. Label instructions can change. Or you may have forgotten a key precaution. Using pesticides contrary to the label directions is illegal. More important, going against the instructions may also make the product ineffective and, even worse, hazardous.

Federal law strictly defines what information manufacturers must put on pesticide labels. The label helps the state and federal governments control the distribution, storage, sale, use, and disposal of pesticides. Before a manufacturer can sell a pesticide, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency must approve its label language. In California, the Department of Pesticide Regulation must accept label language before a product can be sold or used in the state.

Take time to look at the whole label. ***Read each section.*** Understanding the label is important to use a product safely, and effectively. Some pesticides have the information you need on the front and back labels of the container. Others have small, foldout booklets. The main sections of a label are:

Common Name and Brand Name.

Some pesticides have *common names* that are easier to identify than chemical names. For instance, carbaryl is the common name for the compound whose chemical name is 1-naphthyl N-methylcarbamate. A chemical made by more than one company will be sold under several *brand names*, but you may find the same chemical name or common name on all of them.

Active Ingredients. The "active ingredient" is the component in the product that kills or otherwise controls the target pest. The label must list the active ingredient prominently displayed. The amount of an active ingredient is given as a percentage by weight. It can be listed either by the chemical or the common name. Inert ingredients need not be named but the label must tell you their percentage of the total contents.

EPA Registration Number. This number tells you that U.S. EPA has reviewed the product and determined it can be used without risk if you follow the directions on the label properly. The number is not a product endorsement or guarantee of effectiveness.

Signal Words. To do their job, most pesticides must control the target pest and may be toxic. You can tell approximately how hazardous a pesticide could be to people by reading the *signal word* on the label, *DANGER* (the most hazardous), *WARNING*, or *CAUTION*. The most toxic products are labeled *DANGER--POISON*, with a skull-and-crossbones symbol. Most of these products are not for consumer use. They can be bought and used only by state-certified, professional pesticide applicators.

Besides the signal word, pay close attention to any warnings in the ***Precautionary Statements*** section. This part tells you about any special precautions you should take, such as wearing long sleeves and pants, gloves, goggles, or other protective clothing and equipment. This section is where you find any extra protections needed for children or pets.

Pesticides are useful tools, but wrong or careless use can cause undesirable effects. The label lists several ways you can protect the environment. Follow them to avoid harming beneficial insects (for example, bees), damaging nearby desirable plants, or polluting ground or surface water (with irrigation runoff or aerial drift from treated areas).

First Aid. If swallowing or inhaling the product or getting it in your eyes or on your skin could be harmful, the label will give you emergency first aid instructions. Look in the ***Statements of Practical Treatment*** section. The instructions are for first aid only. They are not a substitute for medical advice or treatment. **ALWAYS** call a physician or poison control center for further treatment advice. Remember to have the pesticide container with you.

Directions for Use. This section tells you how to use the pesticide. You should make sure the pest you are trying to control is listed on the label. This is your assurance that you aren't wasting time and money on something ineffective. This section also tells you how much to use, and where, how, and when you should apply the product. Always read and follow label directions. Be sure the pesticide is the right one for your pest problem ...then use only the amount needed and no more. After using any pesticide (other than an insect repellent), be sure to wash your hands and any other skin or clothing that came into contact with the pesticide.

Storage and Disposal. Look here to find out how to safely store and dispose of the pesticide and empty containers. State or local laws may be stricter. Call your County Agricultural Commissioner's office to check.